



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Unbroken: The Louis Zamperini Story – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Luke and Lisa Zamperini

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

**Roger Marsh:** Hello friends, and welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope your week is going really smoothly. Perhaps you got a free coffee from a friend. That's always fun. Or maybe you were filled with the excitement of watching your child or grandchild accomplish something new for the very first time. Well, whether it was a little win or a huge victory, I know that we all have something to be grateful for today.

And also, Valentine's Day is one week from today, guys, hint, hint. Maybe you and your significant other will celebrate this weekend or maybe on the day itself. Well, whichever you choose, this is your friendly reminder to plan something nice to honor that person and your love for each other, and perhaps think of doing a nice gesture for a friend or family member who might be feeling lonely this Valentine's Day. Maybe it's a parent who lost their spouse and this will be their first Valentine's Day alone. Or perhaps if you're single, you might plan to get together with your other single friends and do something fun. Well, regardless of how you celebrate, make sure that you have gratitude in your hearts this Valentine's Day.

Now, today's broadcast is about a man you may have heard of. His name is Louis Zamperini. Some of you might know him from the movie *Unbroken*, which features his life story. Louis' life began with humble beginnings and he was born to Italian immigrant parents. Louis had an older brother named Pete and two younger sisters named Virginia and Sylvia.

When Louis was two years old, his family moved from New York state to Long Beach, California, and that's where he became a bit of a troublemaker involved in smoking and drinking. He also struggled with bullies. During his high school years, he was encouraged to join the track team and he became faster and faster. He eventually earned a scholarship to attend the University of Southern California, Dr. Dobson's alma mater.

Now, before attending USC, Louis decided to try out for the Olympic Team. At the age of 19, he was the youngest American to qualify for running the 5,000 meters. That's a distance of just over three miles. And you know what? He still holds that 5,000 meter record even today. This achievement led him to the 1936 Berlin Olympics. And then, in 1940, Louis graduated from USC and was looking forward to competing in the Olympics that year as well. However, World War II kicked off and the 1940 summer Olympic Games that were set to take place in Tokyo were canceled.

The following year, Louis enlisted in the United States Army Air Force. About two months later, the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, and that drew the US into World War II. Now, Louis was serving as a bombardier on the consolidated B-24 Liberator aircraft. His job as a bombardier was to aim the bombs at their targets, making Louis a part of the war effort from the air.

Things took a turn, one fateful flight mission that had a major mechanical failure, and his plane went down into the ocean. Of 11 men on the aircraft, only three survived the crash, and one of them was Louis Zamperini. Then began a 47-day struggle simply to stay alive stranded in the ocean. They eventually washed ashore on a Pacific island and were taken as prisoners of war by Japanese forces. For over the next two years, Louis Zamperini would be starved, physically and psychologically tortured, and then he was eventually released upon the end of the war in 1945, and subsequently returned home.

A year later, Louis met his wife, Cynthia. They instantly fell in love and were engaged after only two weeks of dating together. They had two children, Cissy and Luke. Early in their marriage, Louis suffered from PTSD from the war and it had a drastic effect on their relationship.

In 1949, he attended a crusade led by Billy Graham, and that set him on a path to healing. Louis Zamperini became a Christian evangelist, sharing a message of forgiveness. He even visited with the guards of the POW camps where he was held prisoner to let them know he had forgiven them. Louis and Cynthia Zamperini were married for 55 years before she went home to be with the Lord in 2001. Louis lived to be 97 years of age and experienced his homecoming in 2014.

Well, joining Dr. James Dobson today on this classic edition of Family Talk, you'll hear our very own Dr. James Dobson having a conversation with Louis' son, Luke Zamperini and his wife Lisa. Luke will be sharing personal stories about his father. Luke is the President and CEO of the Louis Zamperini Foundation. Lisa is the Executive Director at the Louis Zamperini Foundation. And together they have one son, his name is Clay, who is also on the board serving alongside his parents. Clay even made an appearance in the movie Unbroken as the Olympic torchbearer, by the way.

Well, now let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guests, Luke and Lisa Zamperini right here on this special edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we've got a lot to talk about, in fact, more than we're going to get done today and maybe more than we can get done in about three weeks. So I hope you're not planning to go home. You and I have been talking about the stories that surround him and surround your family. And they're really just kind of breathtaking because of what he went through. I call him a national treasure or a hero. You agree with that, don't you?

Luke Zamperini: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, I have a senatorial bipartisan resolution and a congressional bipartisan resolution, both declaring Louis Zamperini to be a national hero.

Dr. James Dobson: You were very close to him, weren't you?

Luke Zamperini: Yes, I was very close to my father. I loved being with him. I loved taking him places. I used to take him on his speaking engagements and listen to him tell his story over and over and over again, and I never got tired of hearing it.

Dr. James Dobson: Frequently when you know the backstory of heroes, there's more to it than meets the eye, and if you knew all the facts, you might be a little disappointed. In his case, it's not a disappointment. The way he lived his life and his love for Jesus Christ in the latter years of his life, and many, as a matter of fact, even though he was not a Christian in his younger years, it is as impressive as we think it is, wasn't it?

Luke Zamperini: Well, yes. And as a matter of fact, the less savory portions of his story are the things that built his experience to get him to the point where he did become a Christian.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. Well, he was kind of a rascal when he was a little kid. The book *Unbroken* tells us more than the movie did. But he really was a handful, wasn't he?

Luke Zamperini: Yes. He was a terror to his community of Torrance, California.

Dr. James Dobson: Uh-huh.

Luke Zamperini: So Louis began smoking when he was five years old. He was so quick on his feet that he used to steal alcohol from bootleggers in the area, and he was a very resourceful guy when it came to breaking the law. In those days in Torrance, there was no air conditioning, so on a hot summer day, instead of closing the doors to a business, they would pull these iron gates shut in front of it and let the air through the iron gates. Well, on Sundays when everybody was in church, Louis would go get his fishing rod and go down the main street in Torrance, and he'd fish through these iron gates and snag cigarettes and candies and whatever else that he could. And that way he was able to steal from these stores without actually going inside the store.

Dr. James Dobson: Why was he like that? Was that just his temperament? Did he have a tough home life? What made him like that?

Luke Zamperini: Well, he was inherently a defiant person. Even when he was punished, he never cried. He had a loving family. His mother and father, being Italian immigrants, were good parents. He had a brother and two sisters. Yet, Louis was just incorrigible. He was smart and could figure out ways to get what he wanted. I think it was the attention that he was getting from when he got caught. It was my Uncle Pete who finally figured out that if he could channel Louis' energies into sports, he might be able to keep him from going to jail. And so, he got together with the Chief of Police in Torrance, California and got the Chief of Police to convince the school principal to allow Louis to participate in sports even though he didn't have the grades to do so and even though he was constantly in trouble in school.

Dr. James Dobson: And he turned out to be a great athlete. He was a runner.

Luke Zamperini: He did. He went into... The police chief said, "Well, since we've been chasing him all over town all these years, I suggest running would be a good sport for him." And so, he went out for distance running at Torrance High School.

Dr. James Dobson: And was fast.

Luke Zamperini: He was. His event was the mile. Even though he ran half-miles and two-miles in cross-country, the mile is what he ran. And being a high school student at Torrance High, he set the National Collegiate Record for the mile at four minutes, 21 seconds and change that was held for 19 years.

Dr. James Dobson: That may not sound fast now, but it was faster than anybody in the world at the time.

Luke Zamperini: The world record still hadn't broken the four-minute mile, and it was, I forget what the mile record was at the time, but when my dad finally got into college, he set the National Collegiate Record at four minutes, 8.3 seconds.

Dr. James Dobson: At USC.

Luke Zamperini: University of Southern California, and that record held for 14 years.

Dr. James Dobson: Mm-hmm. He actually ran the 5,000-yard distance in the Olympics of 1936 when Jesse Owens was the sensation.

Luke Zamperini: Yeah, that's right. The positions that were open for the mile run or the 1,500-meter run in the Olympic team was already taken up. And so, my uncle enrolled my father for the 5,000-meter run, and he'd never run it before. The second time he ran the 5,000 meters, he actually tied the World Record holder Don Lash and got himself onto the US Olympic Team in 1936.

Dr. James Dobson: 1936 was the year that Adolf Hitler made a political thing out of the Olympics, and of course, Jesse Owens was Black. And Hitler hated any races other than the Aryan race, which he saw as representing Germany. We remember those Olympics because of the prelude to World War II. Shirley and I have been to Berlin, and we went to that stadium, and I've stood in the place where Adolf Hitler sat. And of course, the press and all the other folderol that went along with that Olympics took place there in that year.

Luke Zamperini: In 1936, he made the team running the 5,000 meter. Interestingly enough, his roommates in the Olympic Village in Germany was Jesse Owens and Mack Robinson and Mack Robinson, the brother of Jackie Robinson. They were tasked at keeping the young Zamperini out of trouble, which they did to some extent. But after he ran his final heat of the 5,000 meters, where he actually set a record for the very last lap in that 5,000 meters at 56 seconds. That was so fast that it drew the attention of Adolf Hitler who then summoned him to the podium, what you were talking about.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Luke Zamperini: Because he wanted to meet the boy with the fast finish. So they met, they shook hands briefly. And it was interesting because Hitler refused to shake Jesse Owens' hand, but he shook Jesse's roommate's hand instead.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, there's no great honor in that.

Luke Zamperini: No, none at all.

Dr. James Dobson: But your dad stole a flag, a swastika flag with the black and red colors.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. After his heat, he went and sampled some of the automats that they had in the Olympic Village, and you could put a couple of pfennig in the machine and out would become a liter of beer. So he had a couple liters of beer and went wandering through the city, and he found himself in front of the Reich Chancellery Building. And there were all these Nazi swastikas on flagpoles hanging off the front of the building, and he decided that he really wanted to have one of those as a souvenir. So there were guards walking to and fro in front of the building, and he figured his timing would be correct that just as those guards passed each other that he would take a dash for the building and get up the side of it and grab a flag and be gone before they knew what happened. Of course, he got up the side of the building and the flag was a little higher than he thought it would be, so it took him a little longer to get a hold of it. But when he did...

Dr. James Dobson: They took a shot at him.

Luke Zamperini: Yeah. He dropped to the ground with his flag and his hands just started running. And the guards saw him and they were yelling, "Halten sie, halten sie." And

finally, he believed he heard the crack of a rifle, a shot in the air to make him stop, and he stopped. They collared him, and then they saw his American Olympic insignia on his uniform, and they started to question him as to why he had taken the flag. And he just charmed them and said it was because he wanted a souvenir of the wonderful time he had in this most beautiful of countries. And so, they held him in place there for a while. They went back into the building and got permission to give him the flag. And we still have that flag. It's in the Zamperini Airfield in Torrance, California on display with some of his other war memorabilia.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, the winds of war, World War II were blowing at that time, and we know now what occurred shortly after that. But your dad went into the... There wasn't an Air Force but the Army Air Force.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. There was the Army Air Force that later became the Air Force. And my dad volunteered to go into the Army Air Force before Pearl Harbor. A lot of men were seeing the winds of war coming, and in support of their country they started volunteering before there even was a draft. And so, he went into the Army Air Force, and he washed out as a pilot, but he was very mechanically minded and he did very well with the Norden Bombsight. So they turned him into a bombardier on a B-24 Liberator. And then, he served in the Pacific Theatre being based on Oahu. He went on several bombing raids, one of which was Wake Island. Another one was the Nauru Raid, which was of course dramatized at the beginning of the film, *Unbroken*. And then, it was a subsequent mission he went on that was actually a rescue mission looking for a downed B-25 about 200 miles from Palmyra Island around the central Pacific. It was a borrowed airplane.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. The war with Japan was well underway.

Luke Zamperini: Oh, well underway.

Dr. James Dobson: And Pearl Harbor had occurred.

Luke Zamperini: It had occurred, and this was, Pearl Harbor happened December 7th, 1941. And this was May, 1943 when he went on this reconnaissance mission. They were flying at just under 1,000 feet below the cloud cover, looking to see if they could find any wreckage or any survivors of this B-25 that had ditched there, when the airplane that they were using, this B-24 was a borrowed plane, and it had engine problems. At under 1,000 feet, this plane just cartwheeled straight into the ocean, landing on its left side and just blew to pieces.

Now, my father, to brace for the crash, he got back by the waist gunner area, and he had a rubber life raft uninflated. He was holding it in his arms, and when the plane hit the water, it shoved him under the waist gunner machine gun tripod. And so, he was stuck under this tripod with this raft in his stomach. And then, the tail of the airplane sheared off, and all the cables that went from the

flight deck back to the rudder and the tail, they coiled around that tripod. Now he was entombed in this tripod with all these wires holding him in there, and he was unable to free himself. And the plane began to sink, and he was really good at holding his breath for a long time. He timed himself with being able to hold his breath underwater for three minutes and 45 seconds. And so, he held his breath.

Dr. James Dobson: Was a great athlete.

Luke Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Was still in good shape.

Luke Zamperini: Still in great shape. As a matter of fact, he ran a four-minute, 12 second mile just the day before this plane crash. So now he's sinking, unable to free himself, and the last thing he remembers saying to himself was, "God, help me." And then, he blanked out. He said it felt like a sledgehammer had hit him in the head and he was out cold. Then he comes to, and he thinks that this must be the afterlife. But he had a sensation of floating. He was completely freed from this entombment that he had, and knew that he was floating upward in the aircraft, although it was so deep now that it was dark and he couldn't see.

And what happened was his USC ring had caught onto the waist gunner window. And it caught on there, and there was so much force from the plane sinking and his own buoyancy trying to take him up, that it cut through his skin all the way to the bone on his ring finger. So then, he realized that he was in the waist gunner window and he pulled himself out and then shot to the surface. And for the rest of his life, he could never figure out how he got freed in that aircraft. It had to have been a miracle. As a matter of fact, he was convinced that he had a guardian angel that had freed him from that. And whenever he would pray, he would put a good word in for that guardian angel who he named Victor for victory.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's my memory from reading that there were 11 of his airmen buddies that were killed in that crash. Is that right?

Luke Zamperini: That's correct. There was 11 men on the crew. All died except for three: my dad, the pilot, Russell Phillips, and the tail gunner, Francis McNamara. They survived the crash. My dad got to the surface, the ocean was on fire. He was throwing up all the water and blood and hydraulic fluid that he was inhaling as he was going up to the surface. He saw the two other survivors clinging to a piece of wreckage and blood just shooting out of the pilot's head. So he was able to catch another raft and pick up the other two survivors. That began a 47-day odyssey in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Dr. James Dobson: You said that without a lot of emphasis, 47 days on a raft with no... Did they have no water? They had a little bit of food, didn't they?

Luke Zamperini: They had what was on this raft. Now, first thing he did was he stopped the bleeding on the pilot's head was he took inventory of what was in these two rafts. And he used to joke to me that he was certain that those rafts had to have been provisioned by the Japanese Navy, because there was nothing in there for these Americans to survive on. There were six chocolate bars and three tins of water, and each tin was about 12 ounces. So there really wasn't much there, but it was enough for three men to survive on for a week.

The very first night, the tail gunner panicked and ate all the provisions. He ate all those chocolate bars, and so there was nothing for my father and the pilot, Russell Phillips. They thought that they would be rescued pretty soon, but it just didn't happen. So day after day after day, they finally figured out that they were drifting westward. When they finally saw an airplane that was far to the east of them, and that was in the flight lanes between Hawaii and Palmyra Islands, they realized they had drifted west and they were continuing to drift west. And they figured that eventually they would drift into probably the Gilbert or Marshall Islands in the Western Pacific. Of course, the problem was those islands were under the control of the Japanese Navy at that time.

Dr. James Dobson: So they were not making any progress in finding land where they could have survived. Now they're into the second week, the third week, and fourth. And what happened to the three men?

Luke Zamperini: Well, they had no more food to eat. So fortunately, one day an albatross landed on the raft.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a bird.

Luke Zamperini: It's a bird, it's a pretty big bird. And so, my dad grabbed it by its feet, and they broke its neck and they cut it open to eat it. And of course, this was the first of three albatrosses that they had caught over their seven-week journey. And they tried to eat this one. They just couldn't do it. Raw bird meat was just terrible. The second one that they caught several weeks later, they were able to choke it down. The third one that they caught, he told me it tasted like a hot fudge sundae to him. They were so hungry at that point. So they had three birds, half a dozen small fish, and they'd also caught two sharks and ate what they could of those during their journey.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to have to pick up this story next time.

Luke Zamperini: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: And now we've been talking to Luke Zamperini and his wife Lisa is sitting here. This is just the beginning. Well, what happened from then to the end of the war is the main aspect of the story that is told in the movie. And it will get your attention, I'll tell you. It'll move you. Thank you for being with us today, Lisa. Thank you in your silence much for being with us. And we'll-



Lisa Zamperini: I am here.

Dr. James Dobson: ... talk to you both next time. Thanks for being here.

Luke Zamperini: It's been a real pleasure. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: And there is so much more to hear from Luke and Lisa Zamperini as they share stories about Luke's dad, the iconic war hero, Louis Zamperini. Be sure to join us again on Thursday and then again on Friday here on Family Talk for the remainder of this inspiring conversation. And remember, if you missed any part of today's program, you can listen to it again at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

In marriage, it's important not to take each other for granted, especially when it comes to the little things like taking out the trash or picking up some milk on the way home. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 we read, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." If you are married, perhaps it's time to take a moment to think about those little things that your spouse does for you and let them know how grateful you are for all those little things that they do.

By the way, if you and your spouse would like to grow a little closer in your relationship with the Lord and each other, try our special 10-day marriage series from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Prayer is very powerful, and it really can change all kinds of situations, especially your marriage. To take the marriage challenge, all you have to do is visit [drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries](http://drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries). Then simply input your email address and click on the sign-up button. From the day you sign up and then for the next 10 consecutive days, you'll receive an encouraging email from Dr. James Dobson about how to strengthen your marriage. The email will also include some words of wisdom from Dr. Dobson, and some questions for you and your spouse to answer, as well as a prayer that you can say together in concluding that day's devotional.

Now every marriage requires attention, dedication, and hard work to realize the gifts that God intended for marriage. So when you sprinkle in some love, trust, and grace, you have a pretty nice recipe. To learn more about how to strengthen your marriage with our 10-day marriage series from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, go to [drjamesdobson.org/10-daymarriageseries](http://drjamesdobson.org/10-daymarriageseries). Well, I'm Roger Marsh and you've been listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. We'll see you again next time.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.